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L E T T E R,

FROM

A GENTLEMAN IN SCOTLAND,

TO

HIS FRIEND IN ENGLAND,

CONCERNING

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE BRITISH CONSTITU-
TION, AND THE LATE ALARMING INFLUX
OF SEDITIOUS OPINIONS.

EDINBURGH:

1794

J. R. T. L.

THE FRIEND IN ENGLAND



DEAR SIR,

AT your request, I sit down to give you some account of the disturbances and seditious meetings of some people in this country.—Having had occasion to visit this my native country a few years ago, business led me to see and converse with manufacturers and tradesmen of different professions, who seemed happy in the safe and peaceable enjoyment of the fruits of their own ingenuity and industry, leaving affairs of state to the rulers thereof. Not a word of politics, but what was led to by the news of his Majesty's recovery, and the universal joy which that occasioned.

Now I find people of education and property much the same that they were then; but many of the lower classes are miserably disquieted by a kind of political phrenzy, without example in the annals of men. The change these mens minds have undergone in the course of two or three years, is, in the highest degree, astonishing and alarming; you would not think them the same beings.—If conversation turns on government-matters, reason leaves them; it is no longer a quality of theirs, nor will they hear it from any one. You ask, if they have seen certain publications and resolutions? No; but all on the side of Government are slavish flattery and lies, and the British government is despotic: We want a reform, and a reform *we will have*. This is their language. As to forms of government that have been, or that do obtain in the world, they are without ideas, only they are sure the British Government is the worst. With respect to many of them, ignorance is their best excuse, having left them open to the insidious artifices of crafty and

and designing men, who, having purposes of their own to prosecute, have been but too successful in converting those poor creatures into tools for them to work with. The Religion of the Church of Scotland, as established by law, is that which those disturbers of the peace profess; and many of them have distinguished themselves as the followers of teachers whose orthodoxy is most pure.

Now, that these very men should renounce their religion, the religion of their country, the religion of their fathers, for which their ancestors fought, and bled; that they should coalesce with avowed Atheists, (who, most unfortunately for the interests of humanity, are at this time the rulers of a great nation), and enter into a conspiracy against their country, is such an instance of the direful effects of frantic enthusiasm, as hath not marked any age.

Here the humane historian would draw the veil; but truth will compel him to record what he must transmit with pain, and what posterity will read with horror and astonishment.

The Medicine lately administered by the Magistrates of Edinburgh and the Court of Justiciary *, may recover some, and operate as an antidote with others: but to stay the infection, and confine it within its present bounds, lines of conservation should be drawn between the clean and unclean, by which all manner of intercourse should be cut off. That not only Magistrates and Ministers, but many Gentlemen and families of high rank, have been using means to stop the political plague, I have the satisfaction to know.

At a time like this, when every thing is at stake which men civilized esteem, and the dearest interests of human nature threatened, it is to be hoped, that all good and wise men will unite heart and hand for their own and their country's safety. And this should be done with a degree of vigilance, of which every one will see the necessity, who considers that men who are sworn enemies of our country live amongst us, and eat our bread.
Many

* This was wrote soon after the Trials of Muir and Palmer.

Many whom the writer is acquainted with, and who have not lost their reason, talk in this way: " We complain of taxes, because we think them very high, every year increasing, and not always imposed with good judgement." I tell them, it is not according to truth and matter of fact that they increase every year; they were lessened last year, and revenue-matters put in a train for lessening them farther this year, which, doubtless, would have been the case, if the nation had not been forced into a war.

The tax on births and funerals proving rather unpopular, and not so productive as ministry had been made to believe it would be, is repealed. The heavy duty on coals water-borne, was a tax so unequal in itself, and so distressing to many districts of Scotland, that much discontent, and many fruitless applications to Members of Parliament, were the consequences. It was not a measure of any late administration; but it redounds much to the honour of the present ministry, that they had the discernment to *see*, and *the patriotism to redress it*.

Here the nation at large pays the willing tribute of warm acknowledgements to that distinguished statesman, Secretary Dundas, whose comprehensive powers, unremitting attention and influence, have been to them the instruments of so much good.

To such attention, wisdom, and patriotism, they look up with hope of farther relief, so soon as times and circumstances will permit. I tell the people, that government cannot be upheld without taxes; that every kingdom and country is taxed, where men and their property are protected against violence; that British subjects are not more heavily taxed than the subjects of other kingdoms and states, though they enjoy an assurance of safety superior to any people in the world. But why should they be first and loudest in the cry against taxes who pay none? We are neither of us annuitants, nor do we live on the interest of our money. They who work to us have their taxes paid back to them in the advanced wages we give them, and you and I receive back our taxes in the advanced

advanced price of our goods. The men called Friends of the People, do not pay any taxes. The great body of the peasantry and labouring people of Scotland, as well as artificers and tradesmen of every degree, are better lodged, better fed, and better clad, than people of the same description their fathers were fifty years ago, and at same time have more wealth for their children and successors, notwithstanding the increase of taxes.

These are facts that cannot be denied; and if the condition of the people be really a state of progressive melioration, which it certainly is, why are they not all loyal, contented, and happy. You say people don't owe their improved condition to the weight of their taxes, but to an increase of their own industry. You must allow, however, that taxes have not yet operated as a check on industry; nay, have they not been incitements to it? else why were our fathers short of their posterity in point of industry and wealth?—Necessity is the mother of invention; but it is not every force of necessity that removes indolence and sloth, and rouses into exercise the active powers of man. Our taxes can never hurt us, so long as British productions of all kinds command a sale in the great general market of the world; and that they have done for many years, and still do, in a degree unknown before.

This is proof complete that our taxes are not comparatively heavy: Indeed the ingenuity, constitution, and situation of Britons give advantages that no other nation enjoys; insomuch that before she can lose eminence in the great scale of commerce, and any other nation or country obtain it, something seemingly against nature must take place. To thinking well-disposed minds the prospect is pleasing.

“ We are engaged, say they, in a bloody and ruinous war, with which we had no business.” *Ans.* I wish Britain could have kept clear of a land-war. I once thought she might; and that, by a respectable naval force, we might have protected our trade and settlements
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in every part of the world with a dignity and splendour that might be envied, but could not be rivalled: But many very respectable characters, not more connected with ministers or ministerial men than I am, who see farther, and have more at stake than I have, thought otherwise: I give them due credit. When I see the landed interest, the monied interest, the respectable corporations, the opulent merchants of Great Britain, and thousands of individuals far distant from the helm of government; I say, when I see these laying out large sums of their own money, and straining every nerve to give weight to the measures of government at this crisis, though they well know that the war must increase their burdens; when I see them act with a degree of public spirit, unanimity and steadiness that would do honour to any age; would it be modest in me to think that all they are fools, and that I am wise?

“The *Pension-list*, what think you of it, is not that “a shameful affair?”

I tell them, I do really think the pension-list of Scotland no great affair. I have seen an English Earl who was indebted to report for saying he had expended more in one night than it came all to in a year.

It is said, the hope of reward sweetens labour. The remark must be just, for it is DIVINE. The hope of independence to retreat upon in the evening of life, is a *natural stimulus*: It makes a man exert his talents with zeal and steadiness in the service of his country. I don't say pensions are never misapplied; it would require human nature to be different from what it is, to prevent mistakes of that kind at all times.

They say, “We pique ourselves on the privileges of “a free people; but what can be more despotic and cruel, “than the law by which industrious sober men, whose “characters are unblemished, are forced into the service of the navy, in violation of the dictates of justice “and humanity?”

I do acknowledge, that the practice of compelling men

to enter into the public service is the greatest blemish in the British constitution, and what many great and good men have deeply regretted.—Many plans have been thought of by ministers themselves for superseding the necessity of it; but as yet none have been thought sufficient for the purpose, without introducing some other evil: but I hope the genius of Britain will direct to a safe and effectual method of removing it.

Let us remember, however, that we have not far to look back into the history of our country, till we may find our ancestors called out to the field every now and then, even all that could bear arms, to fight the battles of their chieftains, and carry mutual slaughter and devastation into their several districts, during laws that *were*:—May we think of the difference, and be thankful.

Many who have not joined the levellers, are but cool friends to monarchy; “*a republic for them.*” What republic would you like to be a subject of? “*Any one is preferable to monarchy.*” You have been told so by those who wanted to mislead you. But pray, whence this new light, (for new it is to you), that brings discontent along with it? I know whence it is; and that it is *not light*, but a dark delusion.

I am sorry to find you are given to change, especially as you have the reasons thereof yet to learn.

Under a republican form of government many small states have flourished, great kingdoms never. England had trial of a republican government, of which, however, it was soon tired, and will not soon resume it.

Now, what republic would you prefer? “America, to be sure.” Then you should just go thither. But let me tell you, that from what America is at present, no man can say what it will be, even a few years hence. General Washington is looked up to, and revered as a father, or guardian genius of the country; and yet it has required the full exercise of all his prudence, wisdom, and address, to maintain peace and good order.

From

From interfering views, and jarring interests like theirs, great changes have taken place in the world.—In Holland the magistrates are self-elected, and the people enjoy only the shadow of political influence: In Genoa and Venice, the government is a stern aristocracy, of all others the worst for the people.

In short, if I am to give credit to the experience of mankind, and the testimony of history, our own is the government under which virtuous men wish to live. On this subject I wish you to read Mr Cameron's Synod Sermon, and Dr Hardy's Fast-day Sermon, where you will see excellently illustrated that kind of liberty that hath made Britons happy these hundred years, and the danger of abusing it; and both viewed in the striking light in which the present times have placed them.

You say, a reform in parliament would redress many grievances, and that triennial parliaments would meet the wishes of the people.—*Ans.* Before the septennial bill passed into a law, much had been said on both sides, and many who have weighed the arguments, differ in opinion touching their weight. The act took place in the reign of the first George, when some friends of the minister voted against him, and some anticourtiers voted for him. A repeal of that act is a measure which seems not yet fully agreed upon, by either the landed, the monied, or commercial interests; when Alderman Sawbridge brought forward his motions in the House of Commons, this observation was obvious.

Merchants, manufacturers, tradesmen, and all who have any thing depending on the sobriety of their servants and domestics, are sensible of what they lose by the consequences of an election for members to serve in parliament: For after the scenes of riot and dissipation are removed, and the happy man chaired, the mind is not restored in an instant to its wonted activity and attention to business; and for their part, those gentlemen don't wish to see the experiment tried which promises to remove the evil, by increasing the occasions of it.

Annual

Annual parliaments and universal suffrage would soon destroy the morals of the people, and introduce scenes of riot and intoxication that would continue from one end of the year to the other: for the time between the elections would not be sufficient to settle, disputes arising from the immediately preceding one. This, however, is the reform wanted, and held up as the best by the Friends of the People. Most likely it is, that it would answer their purposes the best: For certain I am, that many of them hope to see the day, when they will be able to divide with impunity the fruits of other mens industry. Could they befriend the rulers of that devoted nation, by raising a rebellion in this country, and thereby dividing and distracting the British councils, it would bring the wished-for period near. The more simple and moderate of these societies, who are not thought deep enough to be admitted into the secret, content themselves with thinking that the time is at hand, when, by the reform, and the consequent removal of taxes, they will live better, without being obliged to work so hard as they do at present. Suppose taxes to cease, and that in Britain their termination will be complete and final next year, what benefit would the lower classes of people enjoy? None, none at all. Do they think that they would sell their labour and industry then at the same price they do now? Would any of them, if a master, be willing to pay his labourers then the wages he does now? No, he would pay him with less, by the sum of the labourer's taxes; and would say unto one, John, you had 12 d. a-day from me, but now, that you pay no taxes, you can have only 10 d. with which you will find you can live as comfortably as you have done on a shilling. Our trade have lowered the price of articles after the rate of 2 d. in the shilling, I have acceded, and so must you.

Now we have spoke of taxes, pensions, pressing, and the war, as disadvantages proceeding from the present government: so far have we resembled the sons of sedition,
 who

who never give more than the particulars of one side of the case. It is but fair, however, to state facts fairly on both sides. Of governments one may say, as Pope does of books, He that expects a perfect government to see, expects what never was, nor is, nor e'er will be.

When a man pays taxes to government, he doubtless expects protection in person, property, and character, together with the undisturbed enjoyment of civil and religious liberty; and that the fruits of his ingenuity and industry are at his own disposal. He has a right to hope that the community at large will enjoy the benefit of wise and good laws, productive of national prosperity and happiness. By this test let the British government be tried for an hundred years back. It will gain infinitely on comparison with any other. By the mildness and freedom of her government, the equity and promptitude of her laws, the national mind of Britain has received a stimulus, productive of a progress so rapid in all the useful arts, as to exceed the experience of history. The spirit and wealth of the merchant going hand in hand with the inventive genius, and patient, persevering industry of the artisan and manufacturer, have enlarged the bounds of commerce, and opened channels of wealth unknown before; the same happy genius that gave birth to such merit, watching over and protecting it under all its forms in every part of the globe. Nor is the period I speak of less distinguished by the cultivation of the liberal arts, and polite literature: Men eminent in the learned professions sprung up and flourished, the line of whose fame will run parallel with time. Now, my friend, was it ever known, that the human mind did thus expand under the chilling influence of a severe government. The ages that are past have no such instance on record. But let us come nearer our own times: it was by an act of the last reign, that thousands of families in Scotland were emancipated from a state of feudal vassallage, and placed in the condition of free subjects of Great Britain, Government having paid to their lords and chieftains, the agreed price of their
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their heritable absolute right to power over their dependents. Another patriotic act of the British Parliament, which took place in the present reign, was the purchase of the sovereignty of the Isle of Man, a measure of sound policy, which gave the first blow to the pernicious practice of smuggling, and rescued the morals of thousands, who are now useful industrious subjects. Beside the depravation of morals occasioned by that baneful trade, the industry of the fair trader sustained a check, revenue was injured, and the deficiency obliged to be made up by those who were not smugglers. In short, the happy consequences resulting from the complete suppression of smuggling, are above common estimation, and can be weighed only by those whose experience furnished the balance for it. It was a measure dictated by benevolence, and worthy of the enlightened legislature of the kingdom, that bestowed the privileges of *men* on a race called *colliers*, a blessing their ancestors never knew. It was in the reign of George III. that British virtue and nobility of mind shook hands with enlightened times, and restored the forfeited estates in Scotland. Now these acts are part of the British Constitution, the great law of the kingdom. And what could Government do to meet the wishes of the people more than making the duty on coals water-borne cease? From the same source, other good and patriotic laws may be expected, where time and occasion render it necessary: he is the enemy of his own tranquillity who doubts it. No people are more jealous of their liberty than Britons: it forms a prominent feature of the National Character.

Did it appear that the Constitution was in danger from the Executive Government, the national spirit would instantly be roused, and they would take the alarm first who had most at stake. Nothing like this appears at present, thank God. On the other hand, the people at large, even all ranks and conditions of men in the kingdom, are more unanimous, touching the necessity of the present war, than any other that happened within the last hundred years. If there be faith in history, this

is true ; and a comfortable truth it is to virtuous minds. No war ever alarmed me as this does. Our enemies have aimed a fatal blow at our happy constitution of church and state, and will deprive us and our posterity of all that is valuable and dear in civilized life, *if they can*. The behaviour of Britons during the present contest, must attract powerfully the attention of mankind, and be to posterity the subject of untading glory, or endless infamy.

I had almost forgot to mention an observation which I had occasion to make more than seven years ago, and which the intervening time has matured, namely, the general course of exchange increasing in favour of Britain, to the no small astonishment and envy of other trading nations ; a sure proof in whose favour the balance of trade is. Here I give you a note from Dr Hardy's excellent sermon mentioned before.

“ From what causes has our island attained to all this
 “ eminence ? and how has the coy heart of Commerce
 “ been won to fix her abode in England ? Recollect her
 “ history, and you will know she is wedded to Freedom,
 “ and with Freedom only will she dwell.”

Also from Mr Cameron's most rational and manly discourse : “ Shall that venerable fabric of our National
 “ Church, one of the best-modelled establishments perhaps ever formed upon earth, which has been reared
 “ by the skill and labours of our forefathers, and cemented by their blood ; under which we have so long enjoyed as much liberty and light of divine truth, as
 “ perhaps are consistent with the imperfect nature and knowledge of man ; shall this asylum of the saints be
 “ exposed to the rude and impious attacks of every daring foe ?”

Now, my Dear Sir, in endeavouring to comply with your obliging request, I have mentioned the substance of what I have heard alledged against Government, and reiterated the substance of many conversations, held occasionally on these subjects, since I came last to this country.

Give

Give me leave now to ask, What you think of those infernal agents in the shape of men, who would destroy such a Constitution, introduce French anarchy and atheism, and clothe our country in weeds of woe!

MY DEAR SIR,

AS it is only now and then that I can snatch a vacant hour from my present business, I am beholden to reflection for telling me, I have forgot some things which you would think should not be omitted in a letter of this kind. When Secretary Dundas expressed his hope of the good consequences of the India business in the House of Commons, what he said was treated by the Opposition as a gasconade, which he found it convenient to have recourse to; and I have heard some of the Friends of the People say, they wished he and Lord Cornwallis, and the whole Indian Army, were in the bottom of the sea.

Now, what Mr Dundas said, time has abundantly confirmed: Europe is astonished, and Opposition struck dumb.

The penetration was profound, and the knowledge next to intuitive, that planned and conducted an enterprise of so great magnitude, and brought it to so happy a conclusion.

Nor will it soon be forgot, to whom this nation is indebted for a reform in the mode of paying wages and prize-money due to seamen of the navy: A measure, in which the humanity, justice, and public spirit of the patriot, were joined to the sagacious views of the politician. The impress-service was not so severe as on the eve of former wars.

The Royal navy was manned with a degree of expedition beyond example; because, said the sailors, we have a regard for our King and Country, and the Paymaster has won our confidence. Nor was the merchant-service

service impeded, as on former emergencies: The men lifted freely, or staid with their owners ships; so that the time and expence lost in hiding and seeking, was nothing in comparison.

These are all matters of fact, known to the world at large. Give me leave now to mention a thing, which in these cloudy days yields me consolation; it is this: I think, with humble reverence, that if the King of the World had meant to withdraw his protection at this time, on account of the disobedience and ingratitude of this much-favoured isle, we might not have had, in the course of Providence, men of such distinguished eminence at the helm of affairs to guide the state-ship through the storm: Harmony, peace, and good humour, are the much-valued enjoyments of every respectable rank in the kingdom. (The exceptions to this are below notice.)

In the cabinet, and in the great council of the nation, the vigour of the empire acts with undivided energy. Our commanders, both by sea and land, seem actuated by the dictates of one and the same mind. These are not the features of a falling state, *Heaven be praised!*

May we know, in this our day, what belongs to our peace. This is my way of thinking. You, my very Dear Sir, have long known it. I do honour and revere our gracious and good King. To the British Constitution in Church and State, the principles I adopted early in life have attached me warmly. Our present Ministers of State I do esteem and admire; and should this war terminate as happily as the Indian War did, the genius of a Hume or a Robertson will assign their rank in the annals of fame.

Excuse this long postscript; and am, &c.

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